

## Milan Day Three: Self-Examination

At Prada, Moschino and more, designers grappled with their own identities, writes Angelo Flaccavento.

By Angelo Flaccavento



MILAN — Designers grappled with their own identities on the third day of Milan Fashion Week.

Backstage at Prada, co-creative directors Miuccia Prada and Raf Simons spoke about “a process of distillation, of filtration through clothes”; “juxtaposition as an act of creation”; and the adaptability required to navigate the uncertainties of contemporary life. Read: wear everything all together at once. Pile biker jackets over cocktail dresses, put suspenders on skirts, render bras inside out, throw on jewels at every hour of the day.

The notion of colliding opposites served as the conceptual underpinnings of a collection that began and ended with nearly identical looks — a stark short-sleeved shirt with epaulettes worn with matching trousers and, just for the finale, satin opera gloves — but in between unfolded in many different directions, including bright pastel-hued silky dresses that had a Dries Van Noten-esque pictorial charm to them; military shirts worn under princess dresses and jumpers that came undone; plus a hell of a lot of uniforms, more boarding school than army.

The effect was visually pleasing, even amusing, with, yes, plenty of juxtapositions as well as unusually comfortable volumes — at least for the Prada-sphere. But was it anything new? Not really. It looked like the nth iteration, perhaps a little more blunt and playful, of one of Prada’s founding principles: unprecedented conjunctions.

That said, there was something new in how stark the uniforms looked, a counterintuitive move in these times of war, but Simons’ father was a nightwatchman with a uniform, “so I don’t associate anything oppressive with it,” he said. “The uniform is a shield, but also a way to free the person from thinking too much about clothing,” Mrs Prada added.

There was a lot of emotion at the Emporio Armani show, the first without King Giorgio. The designer had worked on the collection until his last days, so it can be legitimately considered his output, even though it was Silvana Armani, Mr Armani’s niece and head of womenswear, who took the bow. Titled “Returns,” the outing embraced a timeless style touched by streaks of exoticism. There were impalpable yet clear Eastern echoes — ikat motifs, kimono collars, obis — charmingly dispersed in a sea of neutrals and deconstructed lines. The collection was not entirely coherent, but the underlying Armani style came across loud and clear.

At Moschino, creative director Adrian Appiolaza worked under the slogan “Niente,” invoking nothingness — as in reuse, recycle, reimagine — and thinking of the raw materials of the late-1960s





Arte Povera movement as well as 1990s masters of fashion recycling Martin Margiela, Xuly Bet and those who came before them, namely Christopher Nemeth. It made for a random lineup of pieces that, although often made from potato sacks or other discarded stuff, did not come with the usual upcycling aesthetic. And yet it felt limited: Appiolaza's hand is blissfully assured, and yet he's an obsessive collector whose archive of designer pieces — too often homaged on his runways — creates a tight perimeter around his work, making it feel, at times, stuck. Getting rid of overt references would be a good step forward.

Speaking of archives, Fausto Puglisi is so entangled in Roberto Cavalli's back catalogue that he has practically taken on the late founder's identity for himself, for good and bad. The high-octane energy is there; the sense of surprise not so much. This season's all-gold outing risked turning tacky but the over-the-top glitz was also unmistakably fun.

By contrast, Francesco Murano's purity was enchanting. This was only his second outing and one could clearly see evolution: what began as a line centered around flou and draping is steadily morphing into a more kinetic experiment on the relation between clothing and gesture, fabric and the body, swinging between tailoring and flou with remarkable technical finesse. Murano, already an LVMH Prize finalist, is only 28. Also remarkable is his focus on shape, his disdain for tricks, his soft way of getting his message out. It couldn't get any better.

